

The new man. Regenerationism in Spain

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The Restoration

As Jose Luis Comellas has pointed out the designation Restoration served at the beginning to refer to the actual return of the Bourbons to the throne; but it later became generalized to define an era which was endowed with a very distinct personality (1875-1898), and perhaps even more, to designate a regime, the regime of the Restoration which lasted as such until 1923, or if preferred, until 1931, when it definitively came to an end. The regime of the Restoration is therefore, to date, the longest lasting period in the whole of contemporary Spanish history (Comellas 1996), p.251.

In the first place it is necessary to analyze the circumstances which constituted this moment in history, as to paraphrase one of the most important thinkers of the Restoration, Ortega y Gasset «My work is, by essence and presence, circumstantial »¹(ORTEGA Y GASSET 1932, 1966)², making it essential to know the circumstances in order to understand the man who arose from them and the role that sport played in this “new man” who will be described later on.

¹ Regenerationism as an Ortegian attitude is reflected in all the works he wrote during his youth up until 1917, being repeatedly professed by the author and showing itself in almost all his writings and actions.

² ORTEGA Y GASSET, J. (1932, 1966). Obras completas. Madrid, Revista de Occidente.

According to different analysts³, Spanish society, during this period, followed different paths from those of the State: while the State failed to grasp the secret of its vitality and efficacy, society had renovated itself in such a way that anyone could easily appreciate the profound change which came about between 1902 and 1931.

Ortega y Gasset himself maintained this thesis in his conference of 1914 when he talked about old Spain and young Spain, the one that was disappearing and the one that was struggling to emerge: the old one was the official one, the political one, the State; the new one was the real one, the one related to study and work, society. Manuel Azaña had also said as much when he explained the crisis of 1917 as the result of the contrast between economic improvements, the modernization of agricultural methods, the exodus of young people to continue their studies abroad, the aspiration for a freer life and the persistence of antiquated political organizations: the world of politics did not take part in this evolution and represented a dead weight, incapable of adapting to the new situation of the country or of representing it in any possible way.

Regenerationism was almost like a general slogan or watchword which agglutinated the expression of the awareness of a crisis and a failure which had been festering throughout the 19th century and which became more marked in its last decade; although its roots and the literature on the defects of the Spanish nation can evidently, if desired, be traced back to the 17th century. An awareness which was bitterly characterized by criticism of almost everything that existed: from the political system and the national institutions to the people themselves or «grass roots», from «official Spain» to the «other Spain», where the disenchantment of numerous liberals and republicans at the delay in the modernization of Spain was especially vibrant. The year 1898 arrived in this dynamic of decadentist considerations, worsening the whole process and converting the «fateful date» of the year 98 into the symbol of the

³ See preliminary note in: Fernández Almagro, M. (1936). *Historia del reinado de Don Alfonso XIII*. Barcelona, Montaner y Simón. Juliá, S. (1999). *Un siglo de España. Política y Sociedad*. Madrid / Barcelona, Marcial Pons. p.13. Comellas, J. L. (1996). *Historia de España Contemporánea*. Madrid, Rialp. pp. 219-220.

degeneration and failure of the country: the frustration of the bourgeois revolution, the impotence of Spanish liberalism, the military defeat, the colonial collapse, the disastrous international relations, the stagnation of industrialization, progressive social polarization and so on and so forth. A whole repertory of national defects and ills which had to be recovered from and before which «Regenerationism» appeared as a broad heterogeneous movement of intellectuals and middle class men who, although with different ideological baggage, coincided in the common core of their concerns: the so-called «Spanish problem».

Society

Society, which had a rural base and was politically passive, was moving and was opening up. But first and foremost, it was growing: in the first years of the century the population increased at an average rate of 0.8 per cent yearly, rising from 18.6 million in 1900 to the 23.6 counted in the 1930 census. During the first two decades growth was around 0.7 per cent while in the third it surpassed 1 per cent, a rate which would not be seen in Spain until the sixties, similar in many aspects to the twenties. It was, furthermore, a modern growth, sustained by the simultaneous descent of the birth rate and the death rate, which was evident in the spectacular drop in infant mortality and the remarkable increase in the number of women surviving to the age of fifteen. The decrease in mortality indicates that health conditions in 1930 had improved with regard to 1900. Improvements to health and diet more than medical advances seem to have been the determinants of disease control. In fact the population grew throughout all these years but not at the same rate. Rural Spain at the beginning of the century entered a process of rapid change: the urban population, those living in towns of more than 10,000 inhabitants, had almost doubled by 1930, while in the rural and semi-rural sectors the fastest growth occurred in towns of more than 5,000 inhabitants. Of the five-million increase in the population, in 1930 a little more than four lived in towns of more than 10,000 inhabitants and nearly another million in towns of more

than 5,000. In these thirty years the rural sector no longer defined Spanish society.

The decrease in the active agrarian population, the accelerated and somewhat chaotic process of town planning, and the notorious progress in industrialization: all that was left to evidence was a similar growth in the educational level to complete the set of variables which are usually identified as precursors of democracy. In the thirties there was progress from the first to the second literacy threshold: from an average of 55 per cent of illiterate people at the beginning of the century there was a decrease to an average of 27 per cent in 1930.

With regard to higher education, progress, if limited, was brilliant, varied and profound. A privileged minority learned German, English or French, extended their studies abroad thanks to the policy of grants established by the Liberal Government in 1901, and returned to Spain, not yet thirty, to immediately win a professorship or occupy an important position in professional life. Rey Pastor remembers it as a "vigorous and optimistic generation, extrovert and open to the joy of life, which undertook to revive its dying mother" working stubbornly to obtain "Spain's entry into the international scientific fellowship"⁴. Before the Great War, students were already present in France, Germany, the United States; and immediately after it, it would be customary for European scientists to give courses and conferences in Madrid and Barcelona, capitals which in the mid twenties had become "stops on the international conference circuit". The flow was continuous as was that of Spaniards who kept up constant ties with foreign research centres.

Thus a dual urban structure was built up in all walks of life: together with an evident and sudden process of massive proletarianization of the suburbs, there appeared a new professional middle class which was more diversified than at the beginning of the century, and which was eager to occupy the new buildings, grouped in more homogeneous boroughs, which were taller and

⁴ Cited by Juliá, S. (1999). *Un siglo de España. Política y Sociedad*. Madrid / Barcelona, Marcial Pons. p.50.

were endowed with lifts and running water. The young people made their presence felt in the city streets, in the cafés, in the cultural, literary and scientific societies. Women began to frequent the universities and to expand, albeit timidly, the professional and liberal occupations. The implantation of new industries and the creation of limited companies transformed the urban landscape; the first large bazaars opened their doors; advertising invited people to consume better quality products from posters and the pages of newspapers and magazines; editorial production endlessly multiplied: book reviews occupied specialized sections of the periodicals. The proliferation of public events and shows – theatre, cinema, lectures, and courses – completely modified the environment in the cities which no longer offered motives for lamenting the decadence and death of Spain, and spread among the middle classes the conviction that something new was struggling to replace the old.

Sport

Sport unequivocally represented a symptom of modernity.

At the end of the 19th and during the first years of the 20th centuries, sports societies were in full development with members practising gymnastics, mountaineering, the budding lawn tennis or fencing, and it was also the moment when a world of leisure began to be imagined, “modern” leisure where people discovered the fascination exerted by flying machines, regattas, horse races, automobiles, to be precise, speed, movement, all manifestations of the new “modern” life⁵.

However, society still showed a high degree of bipolarization as regards sports practice. On the one hand was the aristocracy, whose sports consisted of those which had traditionally been theirs, like the world of equestrianism and its derivatives like polo. There was an aristocratic conception of sport as the exponent of the physical and mental virtues of a chivalrous life style which was already in evident decline. Sport as a gentleman’s habit was mainly carried out in the equestrian world and concentrated its physical and symbolic realms in

⁵ GONZÁLEZ AJA, T. (2003). Introducción del deporte en España: su repercusión en el arte. Madrid, Edilupa p.55.

the polo fields and the Castellana Hippodrome. Members of the nobility exercised their bodies in the few gymnasias which were operating during the 19th century, mainly in relation to the practice of fencing. From the middle of the 19th century a very small number of gymnasias had kept up this minimal and expensive activity. On the other, the end of this same century already saw the beginnings of the spread of gymnastics to the more enlightened members of the middle classes. Proof of this was the founding of the Royal Spanish Gymnastics Society in 1887 and the fact that this sports modality was one of the first to organize itself into a federation. In the same way cycling began to develop and organize itself as another middle class sport.

However, from 1900 on new almost imperceptible symptoms of progress could be glimpsed. An example was the arrival in Spain of the sports development going on in Great Britain which was greatly helped by the marriage of Alfonso XIII to Victoria Eugenie of Battenberg, with the resultant veneration of British customs at the Madrid court. Alfonso XIII was a great sports enthusiast both as sportsman and spectator.

During these years the King appeared on numerous occasions in the specialized press, like the magazine *Gran Vida*,^[6] which in 1906 devoted almost all the pages of its October edition to cover reports of the honeymoon of Alfonso XIII and Victoria Eugenie in La Granja and Riofrío. In a long article the magazine, both on the cover and the inside pages, showed the King enjoying his habitual activities of hunting, shooting or driving where he appeared surrounded by soldiers, but also as a tennis player about whom it said "he has made great progress and is today a strong and agile player who

^[6] "In Madrid, there were various short-lived publications going back into the 1900s including *Gran Mundo y Sport* (1906-7), *Sport Universal* (1906), and *Los Sports* (1910). The first two lasting sports publications in the city were *Gran Vida* (1903-1936) and *España Sportiva* (1912-1933), both of which survived into the 1930s. *Gran Vida* was the more important of the two and openly embraced the pedagogical benefits of physical education, and football in particular, as a regenerative for the country as befitted its foundation in the first years of the century when those ideals were strongest. The directors of *Gran Vida* worked together with Carlos Padrós of Real Madrid and the publication became the first voice of Madrid's football community". (McFarland, *Creating a National Passion: Football, Nationalism, and Mass Consumerism in Modern Spain*, 245).

attracts attention with the jumps with which he runs to hit the ball, sometimes from afar (...) these high jumps (...) are characteristic of his game". ^[7]

The King was therefore shown as an active sportsman in the press, who lost no opportunity to play any of its modalities like golf, and even contributed to establishing them, as in the case of polo, a sport which had been introduced by his father but which he re-launched, opening the field that the former King had built and inaugurating a new one: the Royal Club of Puerta de Hierro; and he also had a Polo field constructed in the mentioned city of La Granja, where he liked to spend the autumn practising different sports. ^[8]

At the dawn of the century motor racing made its entrance into the wealthier social groups, especially after the King ordered a 24 hp Panhard and Levassor car to be made for him, in July 1902, and later in 1905 supported the Spanish automobile industry promoting the cars made by Hispano Suiza. ^[9] The King would frequently attend different sports events driving his own car ^[10] and he even took part in excursions organized by the Royal Automobile Club of Spain, like those held in 1905, one to La Granja and the other to Toledo. Judging by the reports in the press, these trips were not devoid of problems for the drivers when they had to avoid holes and other obstacles which were common on the roads due to their deplorable state of repair. Thus one reporter stated ironically: "Once on the road our troubles began, because thanks to the efficiency of those who have to take care of them, our roads are in a dreadful state, and when you see the numerous houses of the road menders which are found every so often, you get the idea that these workers, on the orders of their respective engineers, and these on the orders of the corresponding Department, have the mission to destroy the roads, as not only do they not fill in the numerous deep holes made by the rain and the passing of carts, but

^[7] *Gran Vida*, October 1906, p.2.

^[8] *Gran Vida*, January 1909, p. 8.

^[9] *Gran Vida*, January 1905, p. 7.

^[10] *Gran Vida*, n° 24, May 1905, p. 11.

they make piles of gravel in different places and leave them there until they are flattened by passing vehicles or reduced to dust by the weather". ^[11]

The majority of the people who organized and took part in this type of events logically belonged to the aristocracy. In the *automobile associations* there was more of a balance between the aristocrats and the wealthy bourgeoisie than, for example in 1902, on the board of directors of the Spanish Society for the Promotion of Horse Breeding, presided by the Marquis of Alcañices and Duke of Sesto, which looked like a catalogue of the Spanish nobility: of the eleven members, eight were aristocrats, one was an army general and there were only two who had no noble titles. In *Auto-garaje Madrid* there were only three noble titles during the same era. In contrast the largest tax payers did not figure among the directors of the associations of velocipedists. The cycling fans did however appreciate the King's symbolic value and named him president of the Spanish Union of Velocipedists, in May 1902.

Of greater importance were the first initiatives of sectors of the Madrid middle class, at times derived from aristocratic sports, but in general with signs of their own identity which were closely identified with the teachings of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza [Free Teaching Institution], an indefatigable propagandist of the virtues of sport to achieve the ancient principle of *mens sana in corpore sano*. In the midst of an era of revision and questioning after 1898, sports Regenerationism can be said to have been born with its centres in the major Spanish cities. In the case of Madrid, the first two decades of the 20th century saw the first relatively modest expansion of cycling, athletic competitions and football, with the middle classes as protagonists drawn from the university environment.

The new man

A "New Man" appeared in this social and cultural panorama, a product of the Restoration. A New Man in the sense of a new humanism, or a new human

^[11] *Gran Vida*, nº 25, May 1905, p.25.

ideal. In this new man, ideas prevailed over feelings, reason over temperament, in accordance with the post-Romantic mentality¹²; above all he was not a Romantic. The Romantic acted on impulse, let himself be swayed by his feelings, he improvised and his historical acts caused an almost unpredictable future. Now he would no longer be led by his impulses, but by his ideas. The head ruled the heart, which meant that the number of duels (and suicides) decreased, as a consequence of an increase in rationality and a less melodramatic way of understanding life. The efficiency of the duel was doubted as a "judgement of God" since it "was seen that the justice of on high was not worth more than that down here on earth and that on and off the duelling ground strength prevails over right"¹³. However, while duels decreased there was an important appreciation of fencing as an exercise which was "educational for the adolescent, not only physically but morally, since as well as tempering the muscles and nerves, it tempers the soul of the future statesman, or businessman, giving him the characteristics of will power, self dominion, temperance and respect for others' rights"¹⁴.

A new way of being and acting was imposed from then on and, what is more important historically this change in the way of being and acting was irreversible.

Ideas were only worthwhile if they could be put into practice, and nothing was to be done which did not respond to an idea which had been conceived and reasoned beforehand. Thought and action had to march together: it was no longer acceptable like in the contradictory Romantic era, to preach one thing and practice another.

The men who were in favour of Regenerationism had a determined attitude to Spain and its problems. What can be found generically in this attitude is the

¹² The concept had already been openly manifested by Salmerón (Professor of Metaphysics and Spanish politician, who occupied in 1873, for a month and a half, the presidency of the Spanish Republic) and in Gumersindo de Azcárate, both expelled from the university in 1875, together with Giner de los Rios, for their progressist ideas.

¹³ *Gran Vida*, 1 December 1903, p. 13.

¹⁴ *Gran Vida*, 1 December 1903, p. 11

attempt to renovate Spain, a Spain which was not liked, but which was loved, and whose defects were argued about precisely to eradicate them.

Regenerationism was concerned with the «national problem» which was associated with the ethnic characteristics of the Spanish people and the solution to which was an educational guardianship and the promotion of culture and sport that would renew Spanish society to attain the European level. There was therefore a problem, linked to the Spanish way of being, whose solution was to be found in a mixture of education, culture and sport which would permit the “regeneration of the race”. The attempts at regeneration were directed basically at the young people, although children were not ignored, as can be seen in the news item which was echoed in different publications. “The great Tolosa Latour, true providence of children, to whom he has devoted all his life of fervent and preserving science, has launched (...) a beautiful idea: to organize caravans of poor children and take them one day to breathe the fresh air in the mountains (...) a remedy which we should apply for the physical and moral redemption of so many unhappy human beings who abound in the capitals of Spain (...) The project is very easy to carry out (...) To take the greatest number of children possible for a few days to oxygenate themselves, carrying out an educational task of positive regeneration.¹⁵”

The idea was to expel “the harmful habits and unhealthy customs of the life of theatres and cafes”¹⁶, replacing them with fresh air and sport.

We can read the same concern in the text written by Carlos Padrós, founder of Real Madrid and its first president, on the founding of the “all white” uniformed club:

“It was time that the Madrid youth began to awaken to something other than serving as posts in the street, in competition with the lamp posts, getting in the way of the passers-by, devoting themselves to addressing compliments to

¹⁵ “Alpinismo infantil”, in *Gran Vida*, April 1910, p.118.

¹⁶ “La obra del Club Alpino Español en 1911”, in *Gran Vida*, December 1911, p. 369.

the girls, for the most part with expressions of doubtful taste. This generation was a pitiful sight, this generation of weaklings, fed up with everything even before they grew into men, with no illusions, and amusing themselves with stupid partying, which as well as compromising their poor health, demeaned them, leaving their dignity in the dust.

Accustomed to not doing any type of physical exercise, it has been necessary for a group of boys who were educated in the modern way, to come from abroad with desires to continue in their home country a method of life which in other countries is taught to youth as a necessary complement to education, for us here to begin to understand and appreciate the advantages and attractions physical exercise offers. Gradually these enthusiasts began to acclimatize, in spite of the fact that the relatives and friends of these boys laughed and made jokes about everything that had to do with making an effort, leaving behind their vice-ridden customs, in a word, with work. Fortunately, as what is good always prevails, this enthusiasm for athletic exercise began to take root and several football societies in Madrid were founded, which, in spite of the scant or non-existent support from the authorities, progressed a great deal in a short time, creating nuclei of enthusiastic propagandists who nowadays can be counted in their thousands, all of whom cultivate such an interesting sport.

Whatever is done is little enough to imbue youth with the working habit; it must be raised from the swamp in which it is sinking, be convinced that this immobility is atrophying us, making us useless, killing us.

The associations devoted to athletic exercise can be counted by their thousands in France, Germany and England; there are sports for all types of wealth, ages and levels of fitness. It is mistaken to state that only the rich can devote themselves to the exercise necessary to maintain health.

In Spain where unfortunately so little work is done, as half the days of the year are made into holidays, this pastime of doing exercise in the fresh air can develop as in no other country in the world. Given that national production loses an incalculable number of millions with so many holidays, let us take advantage for health and physical regeneration of what is lost for economic regeneration.

Among the *sports* which have gained a residence permit among us thanks to their great entertainment value, *foot-ball* is certainly worthy of mention. It unites all the attractive and recommendable conditions proposed by the strictest hygienist; it is played in the open air, in a field, taking advantage of what nature provides us by the ton to strengthen our health: air and light. This *sport* is interesting because they struggle with noble emulation for victory; with no danger, the boys get used to not fearing it; all the muscles are equally developed; intelligence is a factor which must accompany muscular agility and strength; in a word, it unites what is necessary for this sport to be useful and pleasant.”¹⁷.

This text was written to appear on the pages of the magazine *Gran Vida*. This magazine was the one of the highest quality with regard to the topics of *sport* and leisure among those published in Madrid¹⁸, not just covering the news but also disseminating from its pages the pedagogical advantages of physical education as a regenerative for the race as they stated that “...the human species needs to regenerate itself and this (physical education) is one of the main means to achieve its regeneration”¹⁹, an idea which would appear on many occasions in different editions²⁰.

In this same line of thought, perhaps the most interesting item of news is that which echoed the holding of the “Olympic Games in Madrid” in April 1914²¹. In fact some athletic games were held in Madrid and received this title, according to the article, to “give greater importance and attraction to the first festivals of this kind organized in Spain” and with the desire that national Olympiads would be held every four years, to be able to compete in the international

¹⁷ Bahamonde, A. (2002). *El Real Madrid*. Madrid, Taurus. pp. 18 y 19.

¹⁸ At the beginning of 1900 publications began to appear which included sports in their pages, although their lives would be short, like *Gran Mundo y Sport* (1906-7), *Sport Universal* (1906) and *Los Sports* (1910). The first two publications which lasted the longest were *Gran Vida* (1903-1936) and *España Sportiva* (1912-1933).

¹⁹ “Consideraciones sobre la Gimnasia”, in *Gran Vida*, 1st September 1905, p. 23

²⁰ For example in the editions of March 1907 p. 6, May 1915, p. 150, August 1912 p. 252 or February 1914 p.57, to offer just a few examples.

²¹ *Gran Vida*, April 1914, p. 105 and foll.

Olympiads. According to the journalist who covered the news item, the idea of holding these games came directly from the "Spanish Olympic Committee, presided by the Illustrious Marquis of Villamejor, (who) desiring that Spain should arise again from the physical stagnation in which it had found itself for some time and wanting to train athletes who would represent Spain with dignity in the forthcoming Olympic Games in Berlin in 1916, organized in Madrid in the grounds of the Athletic Club (...) the classical events (...)” listing, with the names of the respective winners, the following: the 100 metre race, the 200 metre race, the 800 metre race, the Spanish league race, the 110 metre hurdles, the high jump with run-up, the high jump without run-up, the long jump with run-up, the long jump without run-up, the pole vault, the discus, the shot put, and the hammer throw.

These Olympic Games, therefore, had as their objective the regeneration of the race through sport, an idea which was quite extended among the nobility, from the king himself, as we have seen above, to the president of the SOC, the above-mentioned Marquis of Villamejor who, like Alfonso XIII, was considered a sportsman. At least this is how the magazine *Gran Vida* presented him in an extensive report in which he is given the title of "sportsmen" (sic) curiously not only because of the fact that he practised different sports activities, like hunting, fencing or "handling the steering wheel", but also because of "his famous stable of horses". It must be taken into account that his link with equestrianism was such that he was president of the Spanish Equestrian Society.

In answer to the journalist he stated that what had been a pastime in his youth (referring to sport) had become, with the passing of the years, "the conviction that it was a patriotic obligation which had to be fulfilled", the reason why "I have accepted the presidency of the International Committee of the Olympic Games" (sic), perhaps it was enthusiasm which made him ascend to a higher status, as he continued by making a long comment which is sufficiently interesting to be reproduced here in part:

"In Spain we receive instruction, to a greater or lesser extent, but we are not educated either morally or physically. We have remained outside the great movement of physical education undertaken by all the nations in the civilized world, as we are the only ones who have not competed in any Olympic Games as if there were no athletes in Spain.

We do too little gymnastics and we do it badly, especially open air gymnastics, forgetting that in fact the initiator of the modern methods was a Spaniard, Colonel Amorós, who, ignored in Spain, went to France and Germany to found new schools. Gymnastic and sports exercises seem to be a trivial affair of little importance, and yet, it was always the nation in which the sportsmen shone which ruled the world. First Greece, later Rome, and then the Arabs: Spain when we taught the whole world to ride with short stirrups and to wield the sword and the dagger.

It is necessary to regenerate the race and this is only achieved with physical education."

In this atmosphere of enthusiasm for the benefits of physical activity and bearing in mind the post occupied by the Marquis of Villamejor (in reference to that of president of the S.O.C. and not the one he states in the interview) it is not surprising that one month later, the magazine Gran Vida published the above-mentioned report on the "Olympic Games in Madrid". These would be the first of a series of "Games" which would be held in the rest of Spain during the following years; they were in fact athletic contests, which should have culminated in the holding in Barcelona of the 1936 Games, which, as is known to all, could not take place owing to the outbreak of the Civil War. The outcome of this war which put Francisco Franco in power would bring an end to the whole regeneration and modernization process and would mean the beginning of a totally different era.

Conclusions

During the last years of the 19th and the first years of the 20th Centuries a movement emerged in Spain called Regenerationism which was intended to regenerate the race and modernize the nation. To this end recourse was made

to different means, one of which was physical education and sport, which were expanding and developing to a great extent in society.

The aim was to form a "New Man", far from Romanticism and whose posture was active and confident in the possibilities for change and one of whose characteristics would be the practice of sport.

The influence of English sport was becoming more and more patent in society, both at the level of the aristocracy and among the more popular classes, and was consolidated in the creation of sports associations.

It was a question of inculcating the practice of top level competitive sport with the aim of being able to participate in the important event of the Olympic Games.

Specialized magazines were founded to cover this new sports phenomenon.

In summary, during the first third of the century Spain lived a process of modernization in all fields. As in so many other cases, the process could have finished in stability although finally this was not the case. In this instance – as in so many others – it was a case of a failed modernization.

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